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AUTHOR Ghosn, Irma K.
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ABSTRACT

This paper is in large part a critique of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences presented in his 1983 book "Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences," and asserts that the multiple intelligences (MI) concept has been widely misinterpreted. The paper outlines some of the misconceptions of Gardner's theory as identified by Gardner himself, and then presents a sample lesson where some of the multiple intelligences are addressed within the context of story reading in an English-as-a Foreign-Language/English-as-a-Second-Language (EFL/ESL) class. Gardner asserts that intelligence is a biological and psychological potential, a potential capable of being realized to a greater or lesser extent as a consequence of the experiential, cultural, and motivational factors that affect a person, and should not be confused with domain or a learning style. The six most common misconceptions are the following: (1) all concepts or subjects can be taught using all seven intelligences; (2) going through the motions of a certain intelligence is sufficient; (3) materials associated with intelligence used as a background will address the given intelligence for learning; (4) using intelligences as mnemonic devices is equivalent to teaching to multiple intelligences; (5) interpersonal intelligence implies cooperative learning, and applies to outgoing, extroverted people; (6) interpersonal intelligence suggests self-esteem programs, or applies to people who are introverts or loners. A sample lesson, including a short story, with some MI components is presented, offering a more complex experience for learners than the traditional bottom-up approach to EFL. (Contains 13 references.) (KFT)

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Teaching EFL to Multiple Intelligences

By
Irma K. Ghosn

Lebanese American University
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1846
New York, NY 10115

e-mail: ighosn@byblos.lau.edu.lb
Tel. +961-9-547254/ extension 2325 (work)
+961-9-790132 (home)
Fax: (212)-8702762
+961-9-944851

Biographical statement

Irma K. Ghosn teaches at the Lebanese American University in Byblos, Lebanon. She is also a materials developer and trainer trainer involved in the New English Curriculum being implemented by the Ministry of Education. She holds an M.Ed. from the University of Virginia and is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Leicester, UK. Her research interests include peace and global issues implementation in the language class and learner empowerment. She is the winner of the 1998 Mary Finocchiaro Award from TESOL.

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Teaching EFL to Multiple Intelligences

Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences, which he presented in the Frames of Mind:The Theory of Multiple Intelligences. New York: Basic Books, 1983, has become somewhat of a fad. It has been sited in several journals and teachers' magazines. Methods workshops, seminars and a variety of publications that claim to cater to the various intelligences have proliferated across the curriculum. The theory is picking up almost at the same speed as the whole language theory. But just as the whole language concept, the MI concept has been widely misinterpreted, and appears in many instances to be nothing more than decorative frames around the same old instructional picture.

This paper outlines some of the common misconceptions of Gardner's theory as identified by Gardner himself, and then presents a sample lesson where some of the multiple intelligences are addressed within the context of story reading in an EFL/ESL class.

According to Gardner, "intelligence is a biological and psychological potential that potential is capable of being realized to a greater or lesser extent as a consequence of the experiential, cultural, and motivational factors that affect a person" (202) and should not be confused with a domain or a learning style:

> *any domain can be realized through the use of several intelligences (domain of musical performance involves bodily-kinesthetic, personal and musical intelligence)...a particular intelligence can be put to work in a myriad of domains (spatial intelligence can be applied to sculpture, dance, sailing, neuroanatomical investigation)* (202)

Reading comprehension may involve, in addition to linguistic intelligence, spatial, logical, and personal intelligence while grammar may draw on mathematical/logical intelligence. Gardner (202-203) further notes that

> *the concept of style designates a general approach that an individual can apply equally to every conceivable content. In contrast, intelligence is a capacity, with its component processes, that is geared to a specific content in the world (such as musical sounds or spatial patterns)*

For example, an analytical learner, as described by McCarthy, will approach all learning tasks in this style, or will do better if allowed to learn using this style. On the other hand, an individual high, for example in musical intelligence, does not approach all learning tasks from the musical perspective, but the individual will do well if presented with the type of content where musical intelligence plays a role.

The most common misconceptions

Gardner (1995) has criticized the applications of his theory in the classroom context that are based on several common misconceptions of his theory. He lists six misconceptions that have resulted in classroom activities being portrayed as catering to multiple intelligences when they, in fact, do nothing of the sort.

1. *all concepts or subjects can be taught using all the 7 intelligences.*

It is a waste of time to try and use all seven ways in all situations. For example, trying to teach a grammar rule through bodily-kinesthetic activities is not an example of application of MI theory; it is an example of learning style-based approach. A learner whose learning style preference is bodily-kinesthetic will benefit from activities presented through movement, regardless of the lesson content, while bodily-kinesthetic intelligent will not be very useful in learning grammar, for example. Similarly, musical intelligence will not be very useful in learning verb tenses, but will be of use in, say, learning intonation patterns or pitch.

2. *going through the motions of a certain intelligence is sufficient*

In many classrooms, teachers are having children march in circles, chant rhymes or paint pictures, in the belief that they are addressing the intelligences. However, unless the concepts to be learned somehow relate to the particular intelligence, these activities are just like any other activities, albeit entertaining to the children.

3. *materials associated with an intelligence used as background will address the given intelligence for learning*

Listening to background music while doing spelling exercises does not in any way help a musically intelligent learner to become a better speller, just as marching around the room clapping one's hands does not help the bodily-kinesthetically intelligent learner to acquire vocabulary. It might, however, help an individual whose preferred learning modality is kinesthetic.

4. *using intelligences as mnemonic devices is equivalent to 'teaching to multiple intelligences'*

Singing grammar rules or vocabulary words, for example, might help learners remember the items better, but they are not an example of teaching to multiple intelligences.

5. *interpersonal intelligence implies cooperative learning and applies to outgoing, extroverted people*

Needless to say, individuals high on interpersonal intelligence will do well in cooperative activities because they can use that particular intelligence, but that is not necessarily be equated to teaching to interpersonal intelligence. Also, not all extroverted individuals are necessarily high in interpersonal intelligence. Interpersonal intelligence, which implies awareness and understanding of the feelings and concerns of others can be tapped, for example, when learning conflict resolution skills and when writing literary journal entries that require a change in point of view.

6. *intrapersonal intelligence suggests self-esteem programs or applies to people who are introverts or loners*

As a matter of fact, individuals high in intrapersonal intelligence are individuals who 'know themselves' and are able to make decision based on their self-awareness. Not all introverts and loners are high in intrapersonal intelligence. Examples of appropriate classroom applications of intrapersonal intelligence will be giving learners choices in assignments and incorporating a self-evaluation component as Campbell (1994:51-52) suggests.

Promising possibilities

Gardner (1995:207-208) himself has identified the following three promising possibilities for the application of MI theory:

1) cultivation of desirable capabilities / skills

Multiple intelligence theory can, for example, be tapped to nurture inter / intrapersonal skills to further the aims of peace education (Ghosn 1997, 1999).

2) approaching concepts and subject matter in a variety of ways; spend time on key concepts, generative ideas, essential questions, but examine them from various angles

This approach will not only draw on the diverse intelligences of the learners in the classroom, but will also make learning more meaningful and transferable and is in line with the constructivist theory of learning (see Grennon Brooks 19__). Examination of essential questions from various angles, for example, will nurture skills required of the global citizen of the 21st Century (Ghosn 1998).

3) personalization of education

Learners in any given class are individuals and vary in their aspirations, intelligences and skills, and thus approaches to teaching should cater to these differences. In practical terms that implies a variety of approaches and strategies, choice and learner participation in all aspects of the learning and assessment process.

Developmental sequence of MI

Lazear (in Christison 1996) has identified a developmental sequence in multiple intelligences that can serve as a useful guide for a classroom teacher wishing to nurture multiple intelligences.

I. Awakening the intelligence: use activities and exercises that make use of sensory bases, intuition, and metacognition.
II. Amplifying the intelligence: use and practice the intelligence.
III. Teaching for / with the intelligence: structure lessons for multiple intelligences, emphasizing and using different intelligences in the teaching / learning process. (However, bear in mind Gardner's cautionary notes outlined above!)

IV. Transferring of the intelligence: go beyond the classroom, integrate into daily living, into challenges and problem solving.

The following sample lesson for intermediate/ advanced level EFL class takes into consideration Gardner's cautionary notes and advice that he has put forth in his 1995 article in the Phi Delta Kappan, "Reflections on Multiple Intelligences. Myths and Messages" (1995; 200-209). It is also in line with Lazear's developmental sequence notion.

The sample lesson uses whole language approach (as I interpret it in an EFL context), which seems to be more 'learner-friendly' than some of the traditional methods, especially because it does allow for the different styles, learning preferences and intelligences. It is also an approach that I personally find easy to work with. In this respect I tend to agree with Diane Larsen-Freeman (1995), who said that "the best method is the one that the teacher believes in."

The objectives for the lesson are somewhat flexible and the final outcome depends on the individual students and their needs and interests.

Sample lesson with some Multiple Intelligence components

Level: Intermediate/ advanced
Age: 8 to adult
Objectives: Flexible, depending on learner interests and needs
Language: modals/ conditionals (could/would/should; if … would); past tense; descriptive words
Reading comprehension: inferential thinking; critical and creative reading; change in point of view
Writing: letter writing; change in point of view; persuasive writing; quoting/ Paraphrasing
Themes: Peace education; empathy; displacement; conflict
Story: The Old Key by Irma Ghosn. (1999) Beirut:Dar El-Ilm Lilmalayin
Music: Any music evoking images of Middle East and/or presenting the following thematic sequence: dreamy hopefulness → building excitement → sudden crashing of hopes.

Procedure:
1. Begin by raising curiosity about the story by inviting students to think about the title and ask : *"What do you think the story will be about?" "Where do you think this key fits?"*
2. Then, play the tape: "*Close your eyes. Imagine the place where this music is playing*". This might be what Lazear refers to as *awakening the intelligence* by making use of sensory bases. Discuss students' images. If time and resources permit, allow students to paint or draw images evoked by the music.
3. Read the story, using directed reading and thinking approach (DR-TA) described by Stauffer (1969). Although an old and less used approach in L1 reading classes, this approach is useful in the L2 class in that it enables the teacher to introduce and reinforce vocabulary and pertinent structures in a natural, meaningful context.

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4. Allow for discussion during and after reading. Use 'reflective listening', repeating student comments in English and extending questions to the class. For example: *Carla thinks that Walid's uncle will not come, after all. Does anyone else think that? ... Rhea, do you also think that he will not come? ... Carla and Rhea think that... What do the others think?* And so on. This will provide ample input without the sense of a drill while also opening opportunities for student output and negotiation of meaning, both identified with second language learning (Swain and Lapkin 1995; Pica 1994).

Reading responses:
Allow students to choose the assignments they are most comfortable with. This is a meaningful application of the multiple intelligence theory. You can explicitly discuss the different choice and what they entail in order to 'awaken' intrapersonal intelligence.

- Write a journal entry from Walid's point of view a) when he is dreaming about the house; b) the day after uncle Hani's visit.
  (intrapersonal intelligence; inferential thinking)
- Write a dialogue between Walid's mother and father after they have seen him sitting and looking at the key and heard him talk about the house.
  (interpersonal intelligence; creative reading)
- Write a letter from Walid to his cousin in the occupied territory.
  (interpersonal intelligence; letter writing)
- Write a letter to Walid, expressing your feelings about his situation.
  (interpersonal intelligence; intrapersonal intelligence; letter writing; 1st person point of view)
- Write a letter to the Israeli Prime Minister, expressing your thoughts about the Israeli/ Palestinian issue.
  (interpersonal intelligence; modals; conditionals)
- Imagine that you would have to leave your home and the town/village where you have grown up. What are things that you would miss the most and why. (This activity can be done orally, or in writing, depending on the needs of the class.)
  (Verbal/linguistic; intrapersonal; visual / spatial if graphic organizers are used)
- Draw / paint the scene that you would miss the most if you had to leave your home.
  (Visual/spatial)
- Write a poem, or compose a song, that Walid might write about his grandparents' home.
  (Verbal/linguistic; musical. Note that music here is not used as background, or 'extra', but reflects the emotions expressed in the story and thus is directly related to reading comprehension objectives.
- Discuss how the music you have listened to reflects the events in the story.
  (Musical)
- Plan a mime presentation of the story mood / Walid's feelings throughout the story either individually or as a group.
  (Bodily/Kinesthetic)
- With older learners (10+), you can discuss the background of the situation and the conflict. A good objective source is:

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Invite learners to brainstorm for possible, viable solution to the problem. They will begin to develop an understanding that some problems cannot perhaps be solved so that all parties would be fully satisfied. The notion of compromise and priorities can be discussed. You should remain an objective moderator regardless of your personal view about the subject. As soon as the learners realize that you hold a fixed opinion about the controversy, they will be inclined to express agreement with the teacher, and a good opportunity for critical thinking and problem-solving will be lost.

- If time and learner interest permit, organize a simulated debate between the parties in the conflict. This will be a good opportunity to teach older learners to conflict and conflict resolution vocabulary in a meaningful context.
(Verbal/linguistic intelligence; Interpersonal intelligence; conditionals)

Follow Up

The work that learners will produce in the above activities can be used for language development activities. For example, learners can brainstorm for words that describe their hometown, dictate their letters to each other, and explain their artwork to the others. Language Experience approach (Van Allen, Allen 1996) can be adapted to one of the above activities, the class dictating their description of the activity to the teacher and then revising their writing. This type of group writing offers opportunities for grammar review, word study, and development of editing and proofreading skills. Pull the most common problems from the individual assignments for group revision. (Re-write student passages to avoid drawing attention to individual student errors.) Analyzing sentence structure errors as a group can be very effective, especially if you invite the students to examine the possible options and their implications. For more details on how to generate language activities from student reading responses, see Ghosn (1999).

Conclusion

The approach described above offers a more complex experience for learners than the traditional bottom-up approach to EFL. It allows learners to engage in dialogue with their peers, and it allows them to express themselves and their understanding of the story, not only orally and in writing, but also through other creative means. It appreciates "the genuine distinctiveness of individuals who have different but equally valid ways of doing things" (Grobstein in 'Understanding the Brain'). According to Grobstein, a professor of biology at Bryn Mawr College, underlying effective learning "is strong motivation to create and make sense of things". An integrated approach to EFL is also in line with other recent research into the workings of the human brain. Robert Sylwester (in 'Understanding the Brain') suggests that skills such as reading, which have traditionally been taught at a slow, presumably easy, ate, are learnt more efficiently if presented at normal processing rates as early as possible.

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Note: This paper is expanded/ adapted from a presentation at the 31st Annual TESOL Convention in Orlando, Florida, March 1997

Suggested sidebars:

Multiple Intelligences in EFL

Tap into the existing individual intelligences and aim to 'awaken' or foster development of all the intelligences.

Verbal / Linguistic
- listen to lectures / stories
- read
- write
- tell stories

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translate
present material orally

Logical / Mathematical
analyze grammar
create categories for spelling/ vocabulary words
construct Venn Diagrams / flow charts to demonstrate relationships
write story problems with numbers
use logical support for answers / opinions (in oral and written work)

Visual / Spatial
use graphs and charts to present concepts (storymaps / sociograms)
express ideas / concepts by drawing, painting, sculpting
create pictorial representations of vocabulary words

Bodily / Kinesthetic
hands-on activities
field trips
simulations

Musical
associate music to story mood
associate music to story plot / patterns
use rhythm to learn / present intonation patterns

Interpersonal
conflict resolution skills
intercultural awareness
literary journals with a change in point of view

Intrapersonal
activities with self-evaluation component
choice in assignments
personal journals / learning logs

Adapted from:
Campbell, Bruce (1994
Christison, Mary Ann (1996).

Reading comprehension with musical, verbal linguistic and kinesthetic intelligence

Write a poem, a compose a song that Walid might write about his grandparents' home and about his dream of seeing it.

Discuss how the music you have listened to during this lesson reflects the events /mood in the story.

Plan a mime or dance presentation to show Walid's feelings as they change during the story.

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The Old Key

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Walid looked at the big old key on the wall above his great-grandfather's picture. The picture was in a beautiful old frame, with an embroidered velvety border, which his great-grandmother had made when the picture was taken.

The heavy iron key fitted in the door of their family house in a village in Palestine, a house his great-grandfather had built of the white stone of the mountains. He had also made the wooden shutters and the massive oak door. The village blacksmith had made the lock and the key for the door.

Walid had never seen the house. The family had fled Palestine long ago, but his mother still remembered the house where she was born. She often told Walid about the olive grove where she had played with her friends, and the vine that climbed to the roof of the house, a vine with the sweetest grapes in all of Galilee. She had described the big lemon tree that stood in the paved court yard of the house, filling the air with the scent of its blossoms. His mother had shown him the deed to the house that she kept in a drawer in their small apartment in the Borj El-Barajineh refugee camp in Beirut. Walid's grandmother used to say that, one day, they would go and re-claim their home. That's why it was important to have the deed, and the key.

And now Walid finally might be able to see the house! There had been so much talk about a peace settlement and signing of documents on the evening news that Walid had begun to dream about going to see their house. He could play under the lemon tree and climb the hills covered in sage! There weren't many trees in the camp were Walid lived. And certainly no sage covered hills!

If Walid closed his eyes, he could seethe house. He could see his mother and his uncles help collect olives and then have a picnic under the biggest old olive tree. He could smell the lemon blossoms and the jasmine. He could hear his grandmother beat the first olives for pickling with tasty summer savory. He could see the sun- drenched hills surrounding the olive grove and hear the happy laughter and singing of the children.

Walid imagined how he would carry the big old key when they went to see their house. When they would drive around the bend on the road leading to the house, he would finally see the lemon tree. And in its shade, their house, shimmering and glistening white in the hot sun of the summer. He would get out of the car, walk up the paved path to the door. The old door, weather-beaten and gray, would have a big key hole next to the big iron door knob. He would turn the key and open the door to the family home, his home!

Every day Walid dreamt his dream about the house and the door where the key fitted.

One day, there was much excitement at home. His uncle Hani was coming to visit with news from Palestine. He had been to see how things looked like now that peace was being signed.

Walid could hardly wait! He had a hundred and one questions about the house, about the lemon tree, about the grapevine, and the olive grove. But it was not polite to interrupt the grown-ups' conversation. So Walid listened and tried to understand. There was talk about 'settlements', 'projects', 'confiscations' and many other things that Walid could not understand.

Finally, his mother was preparing the after-dinner coffee, and the sweet aroma of cardamom and freshly ground coffee wafted from the tiny kitchen. His father and uncle were settling down in the living room with their hubble-bubbles, and Walid could not contain his excitement any longer.

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